

The Address—Mr. Pearson

heavy responsibilities. We on this side, and when I say "this side" I am speaking not in a geographical but in a political sense—I do not want to embarrass my friends who, not through our choice, have joined us over here—wish them health, strength and success in all those endeavours which will advance the national interest and promote the national good. A few of us over here have learned from experience how many, how burdensome and how pressing are the problems that confront ministers every hour of every day of every week in the year, and of the sacrifices of leisure and private life they have to make in dealing with these problems. We know also, Mr. Speaker, that these problems could not be dealt with successfully by any government, however strong it might be, if it were not for a civil service second to none in the world for devotion and efficiency.

May I also, Mr. Speaker, offer congratulations to the new members who make up in unprecedented numbers the class of '58 for their success in matriculating into the faculty of practical political science. Many of them, I hope, will graduate in 1962 or 1963 and I am sure they will do so cum laude. They are entering the commons at a time when parliamentary government, based on decisions made after full, untrammelled discussion by the representatives of the people chosen in a free election, is under increasing criticism and attack in so many parts of the world.

We are prone to assume that this democratic and parliamentary system of ours is not only accepted as the best for man's progress and welfare, but is so firmly and deeply rooted in history and experience as to be unshakable. The first assumption has been rejected by those who control the destinies of more than half the people of the world, and the latter is not historically accurate. Indeed, our form of parliamentary and democratic government is a comparatively modern growth and is far from being secure, even in those countries where it now exists.

Parliamentary institutions today are under attack from four sources. They are under attack from those who do not believe in freedom and advocate totalitarianism or autocracy of one kind or another; from those who have concluded that our parliamentary institutions are unable efficiently to meet and adapt themselves to the new problems that face us in 1958; from the indifference of the electorate to parliament and to politics, especially between elections; and finally from the occasional indifference of a few parliamentarians themselves to the best traditions and highest purpose of these institutions.

In that respect therefore, Mr. Speaker, every one of us in this house has a special responsibility and special obligations as well as special

privileges. The way we discharge them here will affect not only the administration of the government but the strength of our parliamentary and democratic institutions. Speaking for the opposition, we will try to act in a way which will show our understanding and acceptance of these responsibilities. We shall try to be guided by something more than mere partisan considerations as we approach our work. While vigorous and alert in carrying out our responsibilities to oppose, we will try to do this in a constructive way and co-operate with the government in all those endeavours which in our view further the national interest.

Like members opposite, of course, we on this side are influenced and perhaps at times oppressed by human prejudices and other emotions. We shall endeavour to prevent opposition degenerating into mere negation or criticism into mere obstruction. A well known parliamentarian in Great Britain in the early part of the nineteenth century, Mr. Tierney, claimed, and his observations have been repeated by more than one member in this house including the Prime Minister, that the duty of the opposition was to propose nothing, to oppose everything and to turn the government out.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I did not agree with every section of that.

Mr. Pearson: I agree with the Prime Minister that Mr. Tierney was only one-third right, according to the more enlightened parliamentary standards of Canada today. Perhaps the Prime Minister will permit me to quote a more weighty and experienced authority on the functions of the opposition, namely himself. He used words in Toronto on October 27, 1949, which should be a guide and inspiration to us on this side. They are all the more impressive as they come from one to whom we do not normally look for political inspiration or guidance. I quote from what he said in Toronto:

If parliament is to be preserved as a living institution, His Majesty's loyal opposition must fearlessly perform its functions. When it properly discharges them the preservation of our freedom is assured. The reading of history proves that freedom always dies when criticism ends. It upholds and maintains the rights of minorities against majorities. It must be vigilant against oppression and unjust invasions by the cabinet of the rights of the people. It should supervise all expenditures and preventing overexpenditure by exposing to the light of public opinion wasteful expenditures or worse. It finds fault; it suggests amendments; it asks questions and elicits information; it arouses, educates and molds public opinion by voice and vote. It must scrutinize every action by the government and in doing so prevents the short-cuts through democratic procedure that governments like to make.

[Mr. Pearson.]